

Glossary search

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# record

## Relationships

### Broader Term:

[material](#)

### Narrower Term:

[accession record](#)

[administrative records](#)

[agency record](#)

[aggregated records](#)

[architectural records](#)

[archival records](#)

[associated records](#)

[business records](#)

[catalog record](#)

[content](#)

[contingent records](#)

[conventional records](#)

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engineering records  
essential records  
estray record  
facilitative records  
frozen records  
graphic records  
housekeeping records  
important records  
inactive records  
input records  
local records  
memorial record  
municipal records  
narrative record  
noncurrent records  
nontextual records  
notarial record  
official record  
operational records  
organizational records  
permanent records  
presidential records  
printed records  
probative record  
program records  
public record  
semicurrent records  
special records  
structure  
supporting records  
temporary record  
textual records  
transitory record  
vital records

**Related Term:**

data record  
document  
information  
nonrecords  
papers  
publication  
record copy  
recordation

## Distinguish From:

phonograph record

n. ~ 1. A written or printed work of a legal or official nature that may be used as evidence or proof; a document. - 2. Data or information that has been fixed on some medium; that has content, context, and structure; and that is used as an extension of human memory or to demonstrate accountability. - 3. Data or information in a fixed form that is created or received in the course of individual or institutional activity and set aside (preserved) as evidence of that activity for future reference. - 4. An instrument filed for public notice (constructive notice); see recordation. - 5. AUDIO · A phonograph record. - 6. COMPUTING · A collection of related data elements treated as a unit, such as the fields in a row in a database table.- 7. DESCRIPTION · An entry describing a work in a catalog; a catalog record.

## Notes:

See narrower terms for more specific definitions of different types of records. The use of the general term 'record' when referring to a particular type of record inevitably leads to confusion because attributes of the particular type are not conveyed by the general term. In particular, the legal definition of record may change, depending on relevant laws, rules, and regulations. The general legal definition of public records is established in the Federal Records Act (44 USC 3301, cited below), but 'record' is defined for different purposes in the Privacy Act (5 USC § 552(a), cited below). See also business record, which is defined in the Rules of Federal Evidence.

Records are not synonymous with archives. While an archives collects records, not all records merit ongoing preservation.

'Record' connotes documents, rather than artifacts or published materials, although collections of records may contain artifacts and books. To the extent that records are defined in terms of their function rather than their characteristics, the definition is stretched to include many materials not normally understood to be a record; an artifact may function as a record, even though it falls outside the vernacular understanding of the definition.

A record<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> has fixed content, structure, and context.

*Content* is the text, data, symbols, numerals, images, sound, graphics, and other information that make up the substance of the record. A record's ability to fix information so that it can be repeated, recited, or recalled at a later date functions as an extension of memory and is at the heart of the concept of record. A record may be created specifically to preserve information over time or to prevent future misinterpretation of that information, although a record cannot be presumed to be reliable without authentication. However, any item - no matter how ephemeral it was intended to be - may serve as a record if it is later used as evidence of the thing to which it refers.

*Fixity* is the quality of content being stable and resisting change. To preserve memory effectively, record content must be consistent over time. Records made on mutable media, such as electronic records, must be managed so that it is possible to demonstrate that the content has not degraded or been altered. A record may be fixed without being static. A computer program may allow a user to analyze and view data many different ways. A database itself may be considered a record if the underlying data is fixed and the same analysis and resulting view remain the same over time.

*Structure* refers to a record's physical characteristics and internal organization of the contents. Record structure is the form that makes the content tangible and intelligible. Physical characteristics include components and methods of assembly, such as paper, ink, seals, and font families, or character sets, encoding, and file formats. Structure also includes the intellectual organization of a document. A record's structure may be very simple, such as plain text on a page; it may be organized into an outline or sections with headings; or it may be highly complex, including a preamble, the body, and the signatures of witnesses.

A document's structure is contained within boundaries, which define the record as a unit and give it identity by distinguishing it from other information. A record may consist of many physically or logically discrete parts that function together as unit, such as several pages or data values from many tables. However, those parts must be bound together in some fashion.

*Context* is the organizational, functional, and operational circumstances surrounding a record's creation, receipt, storage, or use. Context includes a record's date and place of creation, compilation, or issue, and its relationship to other records.

Records may be in any format, including text, images, or sound. However, the concept of record is ultimately independent of any specific carrier or format. Paper records may be microfilmed, and electronic records may be transferred from memory to disk to paper.

A record is often unique, whereas a publication is always created in multiple copies. However, a record may be a single copy of many that has been selected for preservation or special treatment (a record copy). For example, a publisher may keep one copy of each publication as a record.

Record<sup>2, 3</sup> is sometimes used to mean the record copy or official record, the complete, final, and authoritative version that is preserved. This sense of record is distinguished from nonrecord or document<sup>3</sup>, which includes copies of the official record or materials that are not scheduled and can be disposed of without authorization.

'Record' is frequently used synonymously with 'document'. To the extent the vernacular uses 'record' to refer to any document, without specification, the terms are synonymous. However, the concept of record is independent of format, and it includes things that are

clearly not documents. For example, an artifact may serve as a record if it is preserved to bolster human memory or to demonstrate accountability.

Records are sometimes distinguished from papers, with 'records' referring to items that were generated as the result of routine activities or a transactions, especially those of an organization. 'Papers' refer to documents created on a more or less ad hoc basis, especially those of an individual.

### Citations:

<sup>†</sup>([AJS, Records §7](#)) Under direct attach a record does not import verity. No presumptions arise to support it, and it can survive only in the event that it speaks the truth and is free from error.

<sup>†</sup>([AJS, Records §99](#)) He who acts in reliance on the record has behind him not only the natural equities of his position, but also the special equity arising from the protection afforded everyone who trusts the record.

<sup>†</sup>([Chambers 1988, p. 896 ff](#)) v. ~ Probably before 1200 *recorden* to repeat, recite . . . , later to set down in writing . . . ; borrowed from Old French, repeat, recite, report, learned borrowing from Latin, and borrowed directly from Latin *recordari*, remember, call to mind. . . . – n. ~ Probably before 1300, *rekord* testimony; later record state or fact of being recorded . . . and an official written account.

<sup>†</sup>([Dearstyne 1992, p. 1](#)) [Records are] . . . any type of recorded information, regardless of physical form or characteristics, created, received, or maintained by a person, institution, or organization. . . . Records are extensions of the human memory, purposefully created to record information, document transactions, communicate thoughts, substantiate claims, advance explanations, offer justifications, and provide lasting evidence of events. Their creation results from a fundamental human need to create and store information, to retrieve and transmit it, and to establish tangible connections with the past.

<sup>†</sup>([Duff 1996, p. 29](#)) Records, the fundamental instrument of business transactions, are mutating from a concrete, static, structured document to formless, dynamic data that resides in a computer's memory or on a disk. As records migrate from a stable paper reality to an intangible electronic existence, their physical attributes, vital for establishing the authenticity and reliability of the evidence they contain, are threatened. . . . Records are utilitarian in nature, and are created to fulfill a business function and document business processes. . . . They are created in the first instances to control or direct an organization and to help orient staff to a common goal or purpose. They have residual value because they document the outcomes of the directing and controlling activities and because they provide evidence of an organization's rights as well as its obligations to its staff and society.

<sup>†</sup>([Images in Time 2003, p. 166](#)) All images constitute a record, irrespective of the value we may attach to the information they contain.

<sup>†</sup>([InterPARES Authenticity, p. 7](#)) A record is assumed to be a representation of a fact or act that is memorialized on a physical carrier – that is, a medium – and preserved by a physical

or juridical person in the course of carrying out its activities. It follows that a record cannot exist before its elements have been inscribed or affixed to a medium.

<sup>†</sup>([Lemieux 2001, p. 91–92](#)) Even within the archival profession, there are many differences among archivists' conceptualization of records. Perhaps the argument is best summed up with the observation that one person's 'management information' is another person's 'record.' . . . More generally, the research offers a warning to archivists to be wary of assuming that archival conceptualizations about records are absolutes when they are only one possible way of understanding recorded information.

<sup>†</sup>([McGovern and Samuels 1997, p. 20](#)) Data become records when the content, context, and structure are tied together to provide both meaning and functionality.

<sup>†</sup>([Park 2001, p. 273](#)) Indiana University's *Electronic Records Project* . . . found that records exist within the structure and context of information systems as the consequence of a business event, but not as discrete physical objects.

<sup>†</sup>([USC, 44 USC 3301](#)) 'Records' includes all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government or because of the informational value of data in them. Library and museum material made or acquired and preserved solely for reference or exhibition purposes, extra copies of documents preserved only for convenience of reference, and stocks of publications and of processed documents are not included.

<sup>†</sup>([USC, 5 U.S.C. § 552a](#)) The term 'record' means any item, collection, or grouping of information about an individual that is maintained by an agency, including, but not limited to, his education, financial transactions, medical history, and criminal or employment history and that contains his name, or the identifying number, symbol, or other identifying particular assigned to the individual, such as a finger or voice print or a photograph.

<sup>†</sup>([Yates 1989, p. 12](#)) Henry Metcalfe argued 'Now, administration without records is like music without notes – by ear. Good as far as it goes – which is but a little way – it bequeaths [sic] nothing to the future. Except in the very rudest industries, carried on as if from hand to mouth, all recognize that the present must prepare for the demands of the future, and hence records, more or less elaborate, are kept.'

## **A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology**

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